



## Andorra

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, which receives some privileges not available to other religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 180.7 square miles and a population of approximately 76,875 (December 2004 figure). Very few official statistics are available relative to religion; however, traditionally approximately 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants, with full citizens representing less than 30 percent of the total. The immigrants, who primarily are from Spain, Portugal, and France, also largely are Roman Catholic. It is estimated that, of the Catholic population, approximately half are active church attendees. Other religious groups include Muslims (who predominantly are represented among the approximately 2,000 North African immigrants and are split between two groups, one more fundamentalist); Hinduism; the New Apostolic Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Foreign missionaries are active and operate without restriction. For example, the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize from door to door.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the President of France) is Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicília of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell. The Catholic religious celebration on September 8 of the "Verge de Meritxell" (Virgin of Meritxell) is also a national holiday. The celebration does not negatively affect any religious group.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not mention specifically religious affairs. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups. Registration is not compulsory; however, groups must register or reregister in order to be considered for the support that the Government provides to nongovernmental organizations. To register or reregister, groups must provide the association statutes, the foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to official or board positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization. There are no known reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly had expressed some concern regarding what treatment groups whose actions may be considered injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order should receive. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In spite of negotiations between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque had been built. However, the Muslim community practices its religion without restriction in places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Cultural Islamic Center provides some 50 students with Arabic lessons. The Government and the Moroccan community have not yet found a system that would allow children to receive Arabic classes in school outside of the regular school day.

The Government has been responsive to certain needs of the Muslim community. On occasion the Government has made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

### **Restriction on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

### **Forced Religious conversions**

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such persons to be returned to the United States.

An estimated 100 Jews live in the country. Five years ago, the Jewish community opened a synagogue and a cultural center. The group has suffered no discrimination and is well integrated into the overall society.

### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

### **Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom**

Under the sponsorship of the Foreign Minister, a group of people attended a meeting organized for the first time among Catholics, Buddhist, Hindus, and Muslims and that was presided over by the Bishop of Seu d'Urgell Joan Enric Vives i Sicília.

UNESCO has started an inter-religious dialogue in the country. The project is expected to consist of various meetings to promote peace and reconciliation among members of different religions.

### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Societal attitudes between and among different religious groups appear to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice per month to the Anglican community, so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practice religions other than Roman Catholicism tend to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appears to be little or no obstacle to their practicing their own religions.

There are no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

According to a report of the European Commission on Andorra, the country has no problems related to discrimination but the society has racial prejudices, an issue that could grow if the economic situation worsens.

An opinion poll published in 2003 by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "values and traditions of the Andorran Society," indicated that 52 percent see themselves as "very religious people."

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Both the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Madrid, and the Consul General, resident in Barcelona, have met with Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicília, the leader of the Catholic community, to discuss religious toleration. The Consul General specifically discussed with and urged the Foreign Minister to take a more pro-active stance in integrating the Muslim community into society.

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